

SPECIAL MESSAGE TO GILLNET AND TRAP/POT FISHERMEN

Due to the eight endangered right whale entanglement reports received thus far in 2002, NOAA Fisheries is re-evaluating the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) and considering additional modifications that may be necessary to meet the goals of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The ALWTRP is designed to reduce interactions between commercial fisheries and large whales. NOAA Fisheries plans to reconvene the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team shortly to discuss this issue. Due to the critical status of the right whale, NOAA Fisheries would like to inform you of measures you are required to take and/or can take now to reduce the risk of serious injury and mortality of large whales in commercial gillnet and trap/pot fisheries in the Atlantic.

If you use sink gillnet gear in the Northeast, gillnet gear in the mid-Atlantic, or lobster trap/pot gear in the Atlantic:

- Your gear type is currently regulated under the ALWTRP. NOAA Fisheries urges you to obtain the regulations in their entirety to ensure you are in compliance with these requirements.
- If you are presently purchasing new line, NOAA Fisheries encourages you to consider purchasing *neutrally buoyant* or *sinking* line. These types of line are expected to reduce the profile of line in the water column, thus reducing the risk of entanglement to large whales. The use of neutrally buoyant or sinking line is already required for certain areas and times of year under the ALWTRP.
- If you are required under the ALWTRP to use a weak link on your buoys, you must use one of the configurations on the enclosed "*Techniques for Making Weak Links and Marking Buoy Lines*" brochure. (This brochure also includes techniques for incorporating weak links into a gillnet float rope.) If you are interested in using a configuration not on this brochure, please contact the NOAA Fisheries Gear Research Team to see if your proposed configuration can be approved for future use. (See below for contact information.)

If you use pots to target species including but not limited to conch/whelk, hagfish, red crab, scup, black sea bass, tautog or Jonah crab in the Atlantic:

- NOAA Fisheries would like to inform you that we are currently considering regulations for these trap/pot fisheries to increase protection for large whales. We encourage you to review the gear modification requirements for lobster trap/pot fishermen in your area and call the Gear Research Team to discuss ideas for development of gear modifications in your fishery.

If you would like to receive the ALWTRP regulations in their entirety, please call the ALWTRP Coordinator, Diane Borggaard, at 978-281-9145. These regulations are also available online via the NOAA Fisheries ALWTRP web page at <http://www.nero.nmfs.gov/whaletrp/>. If you have questions on specific gear modifications, please contact the NOAA Fisheries Gear Research Team industry liaison for your area [Glenn Salvador (302-644-2375) in the Mid-Atlantic or John Higgins (207-677-2316) in the Northeast].